JAMES, ARTHUR CURTIS

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AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

Stokes Paintings representing Greenland Eskimo

GUIDE LEAFLET NO. 30

NOVEMBER, 1909

American Museum of Natural History

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The Stokes Paintings Representing Greenland Eskimo

A DESCRIPTION OF THE

MURAL DECORATIONS OF THE ESKIMO HALL

GIVEN TO THE

American Museum of Natural History

BY

ARTHUR CURTISS JAMES

No. 30

OF THE

GUIDE LEAFLET SERIES

OF THE

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

EDMUND OTIS HOVEY, EDITOR

New York. Published by the Museum. November, 1909

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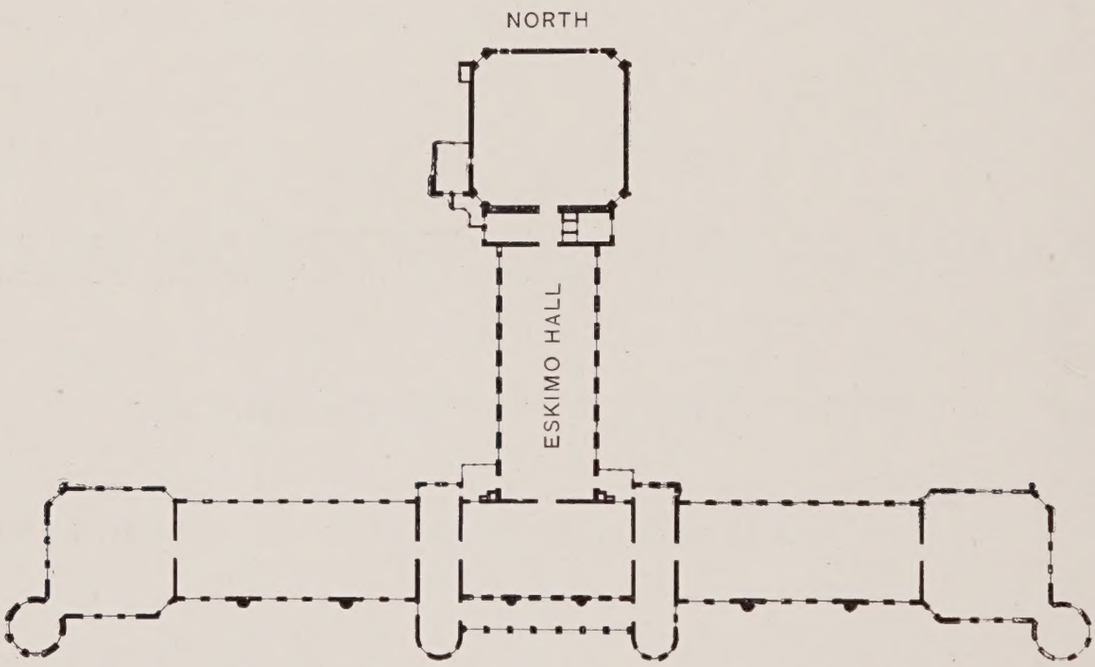

Floor plan of the ground floor of the Museum, showing the location of the Eskimo Hall, where are displayed the Stokes paintings presented by Mr. Arthur Curtiss James.

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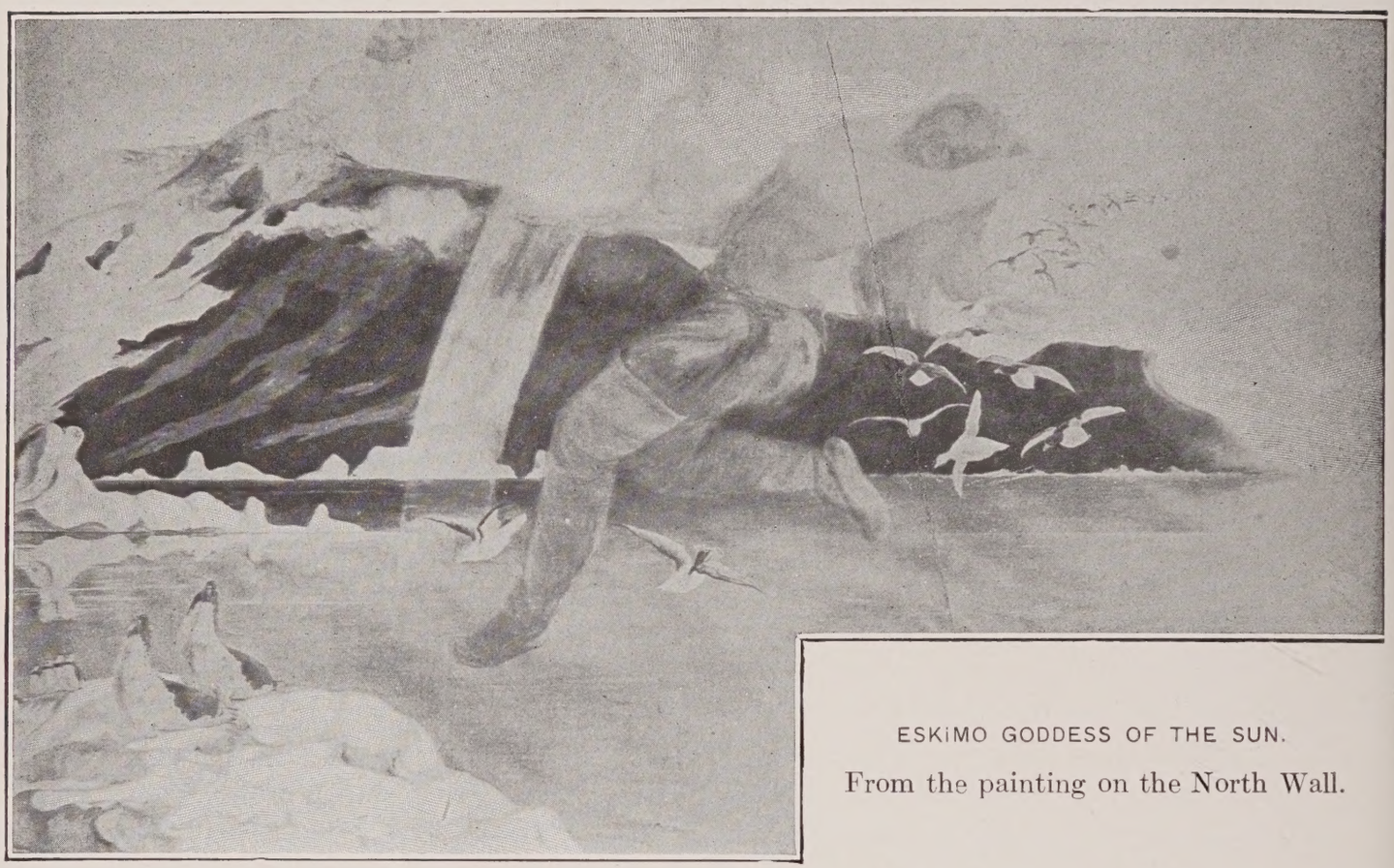
THE STOKES PAINTINGS REPRESENTING GREENLAND ESKIMO.

THE mural decorations at the northern end of the Eskimo Hall have been painted by Mr. Frank Wilbert Stokes, an artist, who, as member of the Peary Relief Expedition of 1892 and of the Peary North Greenland Expedition of 1893 and 1894, has made careful study of the Eskimo people and their frozen country. The Museum is indebted for these paintings to Mr. Arthur Curtiss James, one of the Trustees.

Ranged about the hall below are the weapons, the articles of dress, the boats, the sleds, while above them in this painted frieze these same objects are seen put to use in the daily activities of the Eskimo, revealing his adaptation to an environment of months' long days and nights among glaciers and icebergs. The combination of the scientific exhibits below and the artist's work above, brings home to the observer not only the ethnological facts involved, but also other facts, such as the austerity of Eskimo life, its enforced simplicity and the limitations set upon civilization for the people of the Arctics. Much of the interest of these pictures rests in the fact that many of the scenes represent localities actually visited by the artist. Mr. Stokes established his studio at Bowdoin Bay, 77° 44′ N. latitude, and worked there during fourteen months, with the primitive life of the Eskimo and the glowing colors of the northern land under constant observation. As William Walton has said in an article in Scribner's Magazine for February, 1909, Mr. Stokes has here succeeded, despite the inadequacy of pigments, in well suggesting "the utmost splendor of light that blazes in the Polar skies and glows in the Polar, translucent ice."

The North Wall.

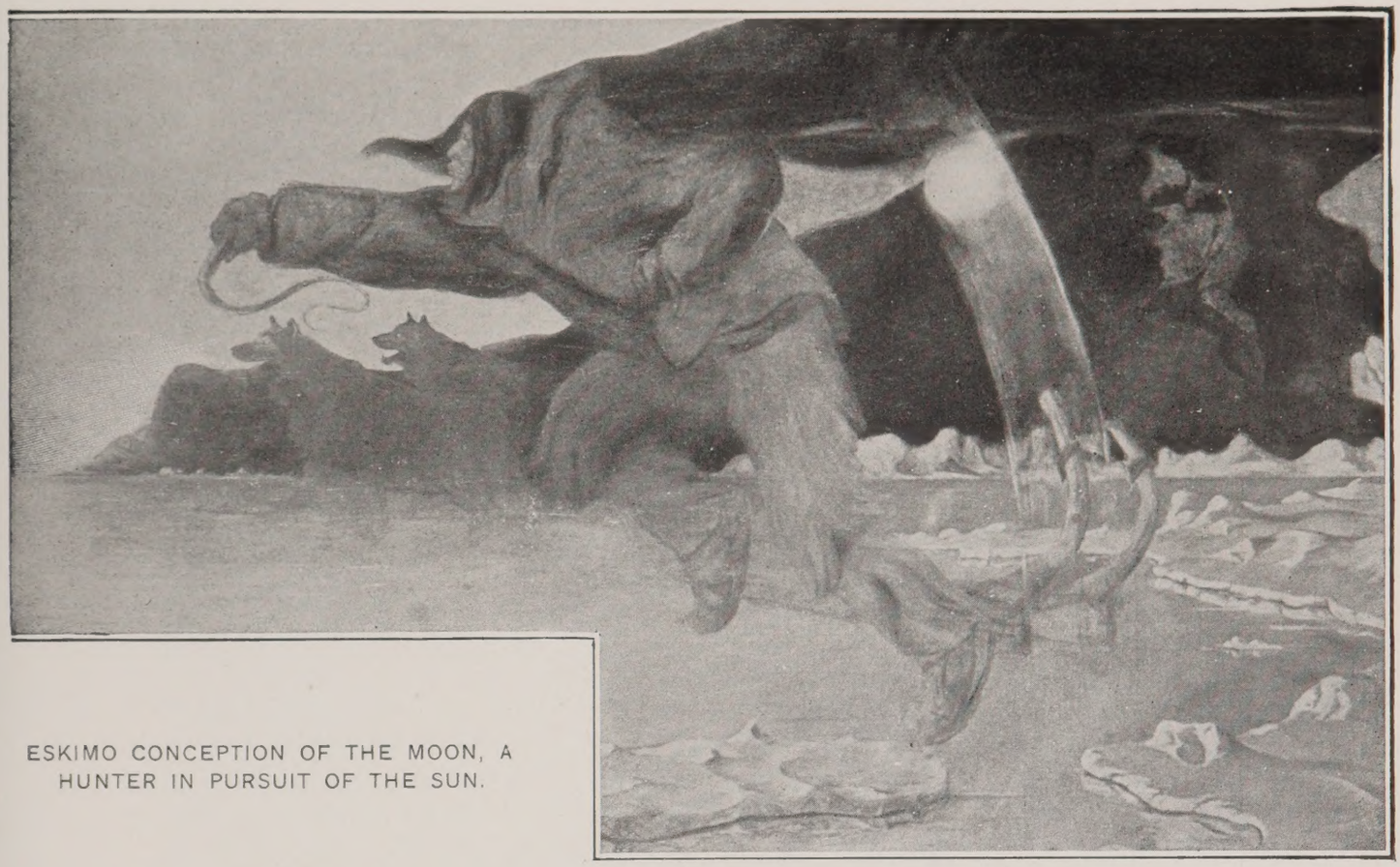
The largest picture of the series — in full view from the main foyer of the Museum — is a continuous panorama sixty feet long. It is intense and realistic in its coloring. In the center the glow of a midnight sun illuminates promontories and sea, toward the right this brilliant color gradually fades to the gray and purple of the twilight that precedes the long Arctic night, while toward the left it changes to the white lights and deep blue shadows of that other twilight that foretells the approach of the long Arctic day.



ESKIMO GODDESS OF THE SUN.
From the painting on the North Wall.

Copyright 1908 by Frank Wilbert Stokes.
Courtesy of Scribner's Magazine.

Against the vivid gold and red of the center of the painting is portrayed the artist's conception of the Eskimo myth of the "Sun and the Moon." There is presented a giant mirage of two figures in full pursuit through the air. These figures are Ahn-ing-ah-neh, a hunter, typifying the moon and ushering in the long winter, and Sukh-eh-nukh, standing for the sun, a goddess accompanied by summer and plenty. Ahn-ing-ah-neh is dressed in winter garb and is driving his team of dogs. The lower part of the figure, like the dogs and sledge, are shadowy in the painting, but the upper part reaching forward in the chase, the head and the right arm with its lashing whip, stand out strong and dark as the forward part of a night cloud that sweeps over the glacier-covered heights. Sukh-eh-nukh is represented by a figure uncovered to the waist (the Eskimo, both men and women, occasionally strip off the upper garments in the summer sun). She carries in her right hand an Eskimo lamp, shown as a sun-dog or parhelion such as is often seen near the horizon at sunrise and sunset in the Arctics. She is a part of a cumulus summer



ESKIMO CONCEPTION OF THE MOON, A HUNTER IN PURSUIT OF THE SUN.

Copyright 1908 by Frank Wilbert Stokes.
Courtesy of Scribner's Magazine.

cloud that floats near her head. Summer birds are about her, a long line following from the far away horizon. Two fulmar gulls are flying in front of her, and two harp seals are crying to her, the "Mother of the Seals," from floating ice below, where also little Arctic puffins are ranged in military line.

The story of the pursuit of the sun by the moon is a legend widely spread among the Eskimo people. The North Greenland Eskimo believe, as do all other Innuit from Alaska to Labrador and Baffin Land, that the sun was originally a woman, Sukh-eh-nukh, who in order to escape the unfilial love of her brother, Ahn-ing-ah-neh, fled into the heavens bearing a lighted torch. The brother also carrying a torch pursued her and was transformed into the moon. It is believed that the moon is forever in love with the sun and seeks ever to overtake her, but that since his torch chanced to be a poor one and he is frequently compelled to return to earth to relight it, the sun is enabled to keep well in

advance. According to the myth, disaster would come if he should succeed in catching her, for with his embrace would come the end of all things.

This legend of the sun and the moon has many variations among the Eskimo people and is sometimes termed the Sedna Cycle, Sedna also signifying the sun. It is possible that we have here not only an allegory of the great Arctic day and night, but also the proof that there has taken root in Eskimo imagination the idea of man's search after the unattainable.

Copyright 1908 by Frank Wilbert Stokes.

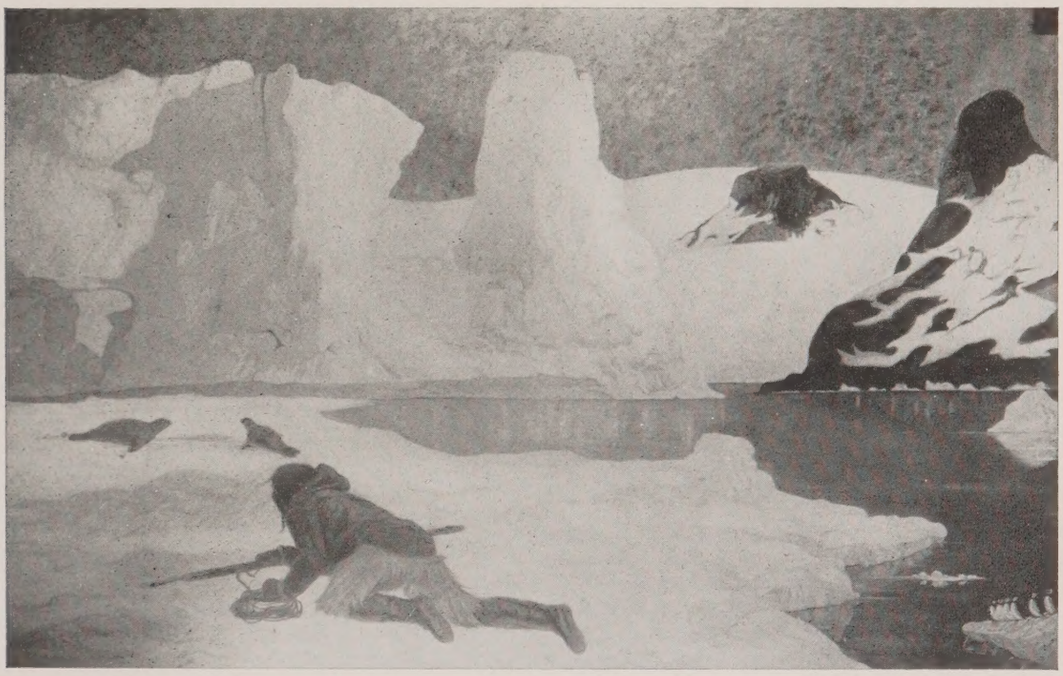
POLAR BEAR AT BAY.

From the painting on the North Wall.

The right portion of the painting, realistic in the extreme, represents the twilight before the approach of the long night, the dramatic interest resting in an encounter between an Eskimo hunter and a polar bear. The hunter has left his sledge and, accompanied by his team, has followed in the chase. He has used his arrows and is now near enough to give a thrust with his lance, the bear's attention being held by the dogs.

That part of the painting at the extreme left tells the Eskimo's method of stalking prey. In the foreground on an ice-floe a hunter, harpoon in hand, is crawling slowly toward two ring seals, which lie basking in the

sun near their hole. Eskimo hunters have great skill in giving decoy sounds. They can make cautious approach to gulls by waving a gull's wing in the air, while whistling the bird's notes; they can allay the suspicions of seals by lying flat on the ice and waving a foot in imitation of a seal's head, while giving the characteristic calls of the seals. Beyond the seal hunter in the distance rises above the ice of the glacier, a bell-shaped elevation of land which the Eskimo knows as a "nunatak." Still farther to the left towers an iceberg, while over all is the dawning light of the summer that is being ushered in by Sukh-eh-nukh, the sun goddess.



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ESKIMO STALKING THE SEAL.

From the Painting on the North Wall.

The East Wall.

The first or northern panel — An Innuit Encampment in Late Autumn.

Pictures of actual events in Eskimo life are continued on the east and west sides of the hall, the unity of the compositions being gained by making the sky line in the east and west panels the same as that of the

painting on the north wall. The three panels on the east wall continue pictures of Eskimo life as it goes on during the Arctic night.

The first of the panels gives a view of Inglefield Gulf, which by November is well frozen over. In the foreground to the right an Innuit (Memkashoo) is cutting up pieces of meat and feeding his team after a hunting trip. The sledge lies to the left, and just beyond is an Innuit woman with her babe carried on her back in a pouch. Such a pouch is made of fox skin and is a part of the hooded upper garment. The head and shoulders of the child are covered by soft fox skin, but the rest of its body lies naked against the mother's bare back and so is kept warm. The child is secured in the pouch by a sinew which passes around its body and around the upper part of the mother's waist.

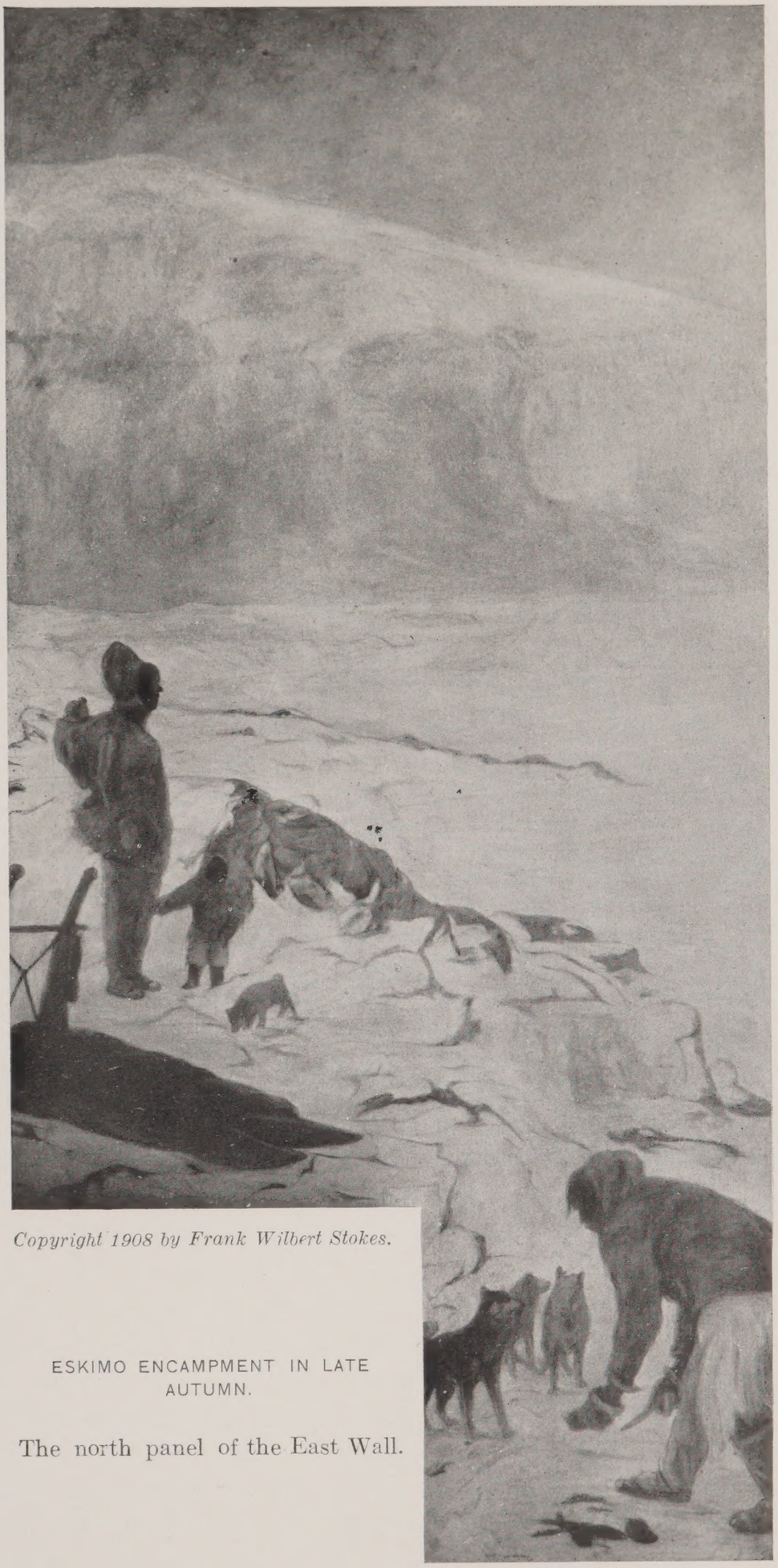
A little Innuit boy stands by his mother, watching his playmate, an Eskimo puppy. Immediately to the right is the stone-built entrance of the igloo, or winter residence, which, partly covered with snow, is itself seen directly behind the figures. The seal-entrail window of the igloo reveals a pale light from the lamp within, a lamp which must serve the purposes of lighting, heating, cooking and drying for the whole family.

Beyond in the middle distance to the left is a bay, its shore covered with snow which is about three inches in depth at this season. Beyond the bay is a long low promontory stretching into the sea, a November sea, completely frozen over and with an iceberg frozen into it. The stars are brilliant in the sky, while mountain, sea and shore are enshrouded in rich orange light from a sun that is gradually receding.

The Central Panel — Walrus Hunting in February.

The east central panel represents a February scene on the ice of Baffin Bay, which is never completely frozen over. The flaming colors of the Aurora Borealis fill the sky and are reflected by the ice. In their weird light is made visible the attack of an Innuit hunter upon a large walrus, one of a group of three in the central foreground of the picture. In the immediate foreground to the right a bull walrus is just emerging from the water. There is no look of fear in the animal's dog-like eye, since he has not yet caught sight of the hunter.

In the Arctics the barking of walrus can be heard for miles. When the Innuit hunter hears it, he may hitch six or eight dogs to his sledge



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ESKIMO ENCAMPMENT IN LATE AUTUMN.

The north panel of the East Wall.

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WALRUS HUNTING IN THE LIGHT OF THE AURORA BOREALIS.

The central panel of the East Wall.

and travel toward the sound, often with only the light of the moon or of the stars to show him the way. When within a thousand yards to the windward of the animals, he tethers his dogs to the ice, and if they are unaccustomed to hunting and will not remain noiseless, he may turn the sledge upside down, to check any attempt on their part to run away.

Armed with a stout harpoon and plenty of walrus-hide line, the Innuit crawls over the ice toward the animals. He conceals himself behind ice blocks or hummocks until the distance between him and the animals is short, then suddenly leaps to his feet, singles out a big bull (as in the painting) and strikes — usually with unerring aim. The whole herd, barking furiously, rushes for the sea. The stricken bull dives, and the walrus-hide line pays out rapidly, but not before the Innuit has deftly thrust his lance, which he carries in his free hand, firmly into the ice. With knee and shoulder braced against the shaft of the lance, he obtains sufficient purchase to play the walrus until the big fellow is so weakened by loss of blood that the hunter can leave his lance to cut two holes in the ice close to the spot where he is standing. Now, whenever the line is slack, he hauls in a few fathoms, and running the noose a couple of times down through one hole and across through the other, obtains a more reliable hold. With the lance now free, he stands over the breathing hole, striking the walrus each time that it rises. When it is finally despatched, he cuts off piece after piece of the meat and seeks his sledge and dogs to carry the spoil home.

Walrus are huge ungainly creatures, weighing upwards of three thousand pounds, but to the nimble Innuit hunter there is usually no difficulty in getting out of harm's way on the ice after he has struck the blow. If, however, the iron point slips, or the ice gives way, or if, as the coils of the line are running out, the hunter's legs become entangled, he is quickly dragged down beneath the water to speedy death.

The Third or Southern Panel. Peterawik in Moonlight.

The third panel represents a winter scene at Peterawik on the shore of Smith Sound. In the foreground at the extreme left is a hunter with sledge and dogs, bringing a load of walrus meat. His snow igloo is at the right, where his wife, carrying a child in her hood, and accompanied by an Eskimo woman, is waiting to welcome him. The sea-ice of Smith Sound stretches far to the horizon at the north; the head-line of Cape Alexander is visible in the distance. The rocks at the right are characteristic of the west coast of Greenland at this latitude, 76° N.

In the spring before the ice breaks up, the Innuit congregate at Peterawik for walrus hunting. They build their snow igloos on the ice foot, that portion of the sea-ice bordering the land. Here they remain

hunting, frolicking and feasting in their joyous fashion, until the sun's warmth has broken up the ice. Then they travel southward, still over the ice, some to the settlements of Inglefield Gulf and others even as far as Cape York.

The West Wall.

The First or Northern Panel — Reindeer Hunting in Summer.

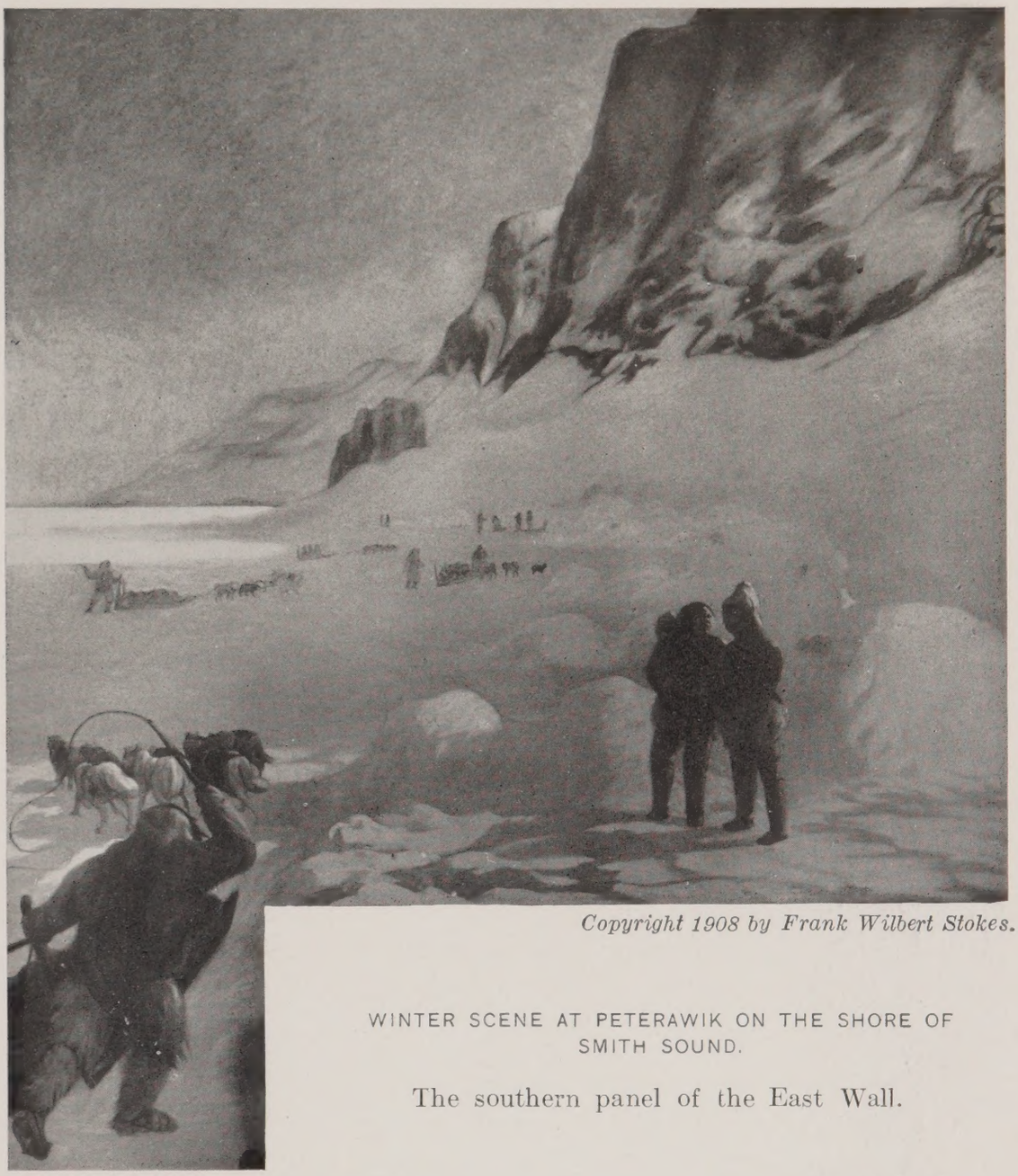
The paintings on the west wall represent Eskimo life during the long Arctic day.

In the middle foreground of the northern panel a hunter, crouching at the top of a rocky prominence, is in the act of drawing his bow of bone and sinew upon a white reindeer,[1] which has espied too late something to excite its curiosity. In the middle distance at the extreme right, is the continuation of the large iceberg of the central panel of the north wall. Icebergs in the Arctic regions are frequently from 150 to 300 feet in height, measure five to seven times this distance below the surface of the sea, and sometimes have a length of three miles. Beyond the iceberg in the distance is a glacier flowing down from the great ice "Sahara" in the interior of Greenland, while to the left is a dark rocky portion of the submerged land.

In the immediate foreground are purple flowers (*Epilobium latifolium*) which nestle in pockets in the rocks. The middle foreground is covered by stunted grass and mosses, especially by reindeer moss on which the deer are feeding. Many flowers bloom in Greenland and other polar lands during the short summer, notably members of the mustard family, and of the pink, rose, saxifrage and grass families. There is one species of sedge known; willows and birches are found, although growing only two to three inches in height; while daisies, buttercups, yellow poppies, harebells, dandelions, gentians and primroses cover the ground in many places.

Another source of bright color in these northern latitudes lies in two species of algæ, one red and the other green. They are microscopic plants that grow on the ice or snow, but they may occur in such profusion as to impart their color to the ground. It is the presence of these algæ

[1] A white caribou (*Rangifer pearyi* Allen) discovered by Peary in 1902 in Ellesmere Land near Lake Hazen, latitude 82° N.



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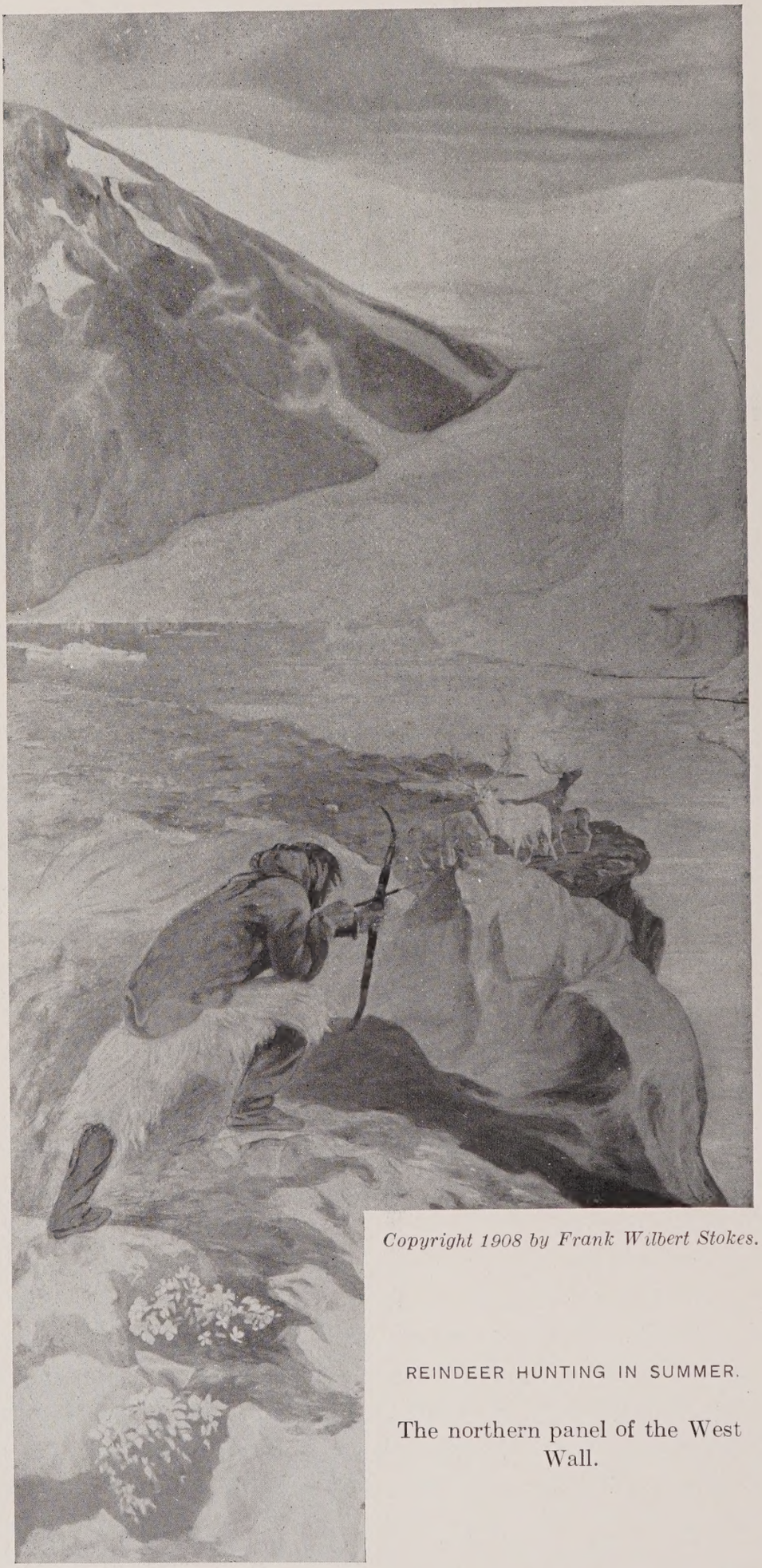
WINTER SCENE AT PETERAWIK ON THE SHORE OF SMITH SOUND.

The southern panel of the East Wall.

that explains the famous "crimson glacier" or "crimson snow" near Cape York.

As to edible plants, there are a few even in this extreme northern region. A blueberry which grows partly concealed under the moss can be secured during the greater part of the year, and is eaten with relish by the Innuit. There are several plants of which the roots, leaves, buds and even flowers are eaten. A plant resembling celery (*Archangelica officinalis*) is a favorite article of food. Iceland moss is also eaten. The chief sources of vegetable food, however, are marine. A



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REINDEER HUNTING IN SUMMER.

The northern panel of the West Wall.

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ESKIMO IN SEALSKIN CANOE HARPOONING A NARWHAL.

The central panel of the West Wall.

seaweed used commonly for food is *Alaria pylaii*, closely allied to "bladderlocks," of Scotland, and in flavor somewhat like asparagus.

The Central Panel — Narwhal Hunting in Summer.

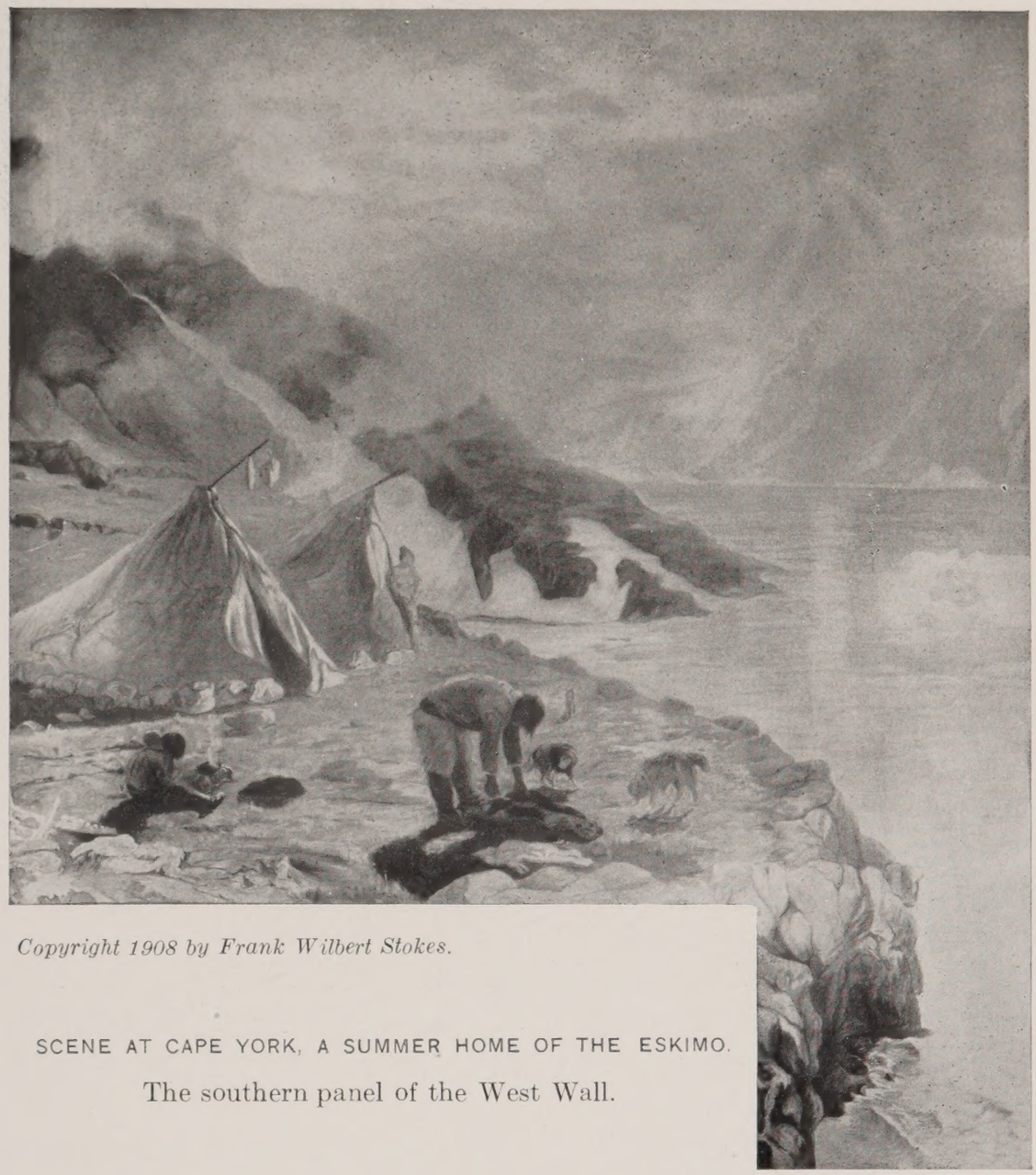
The dramatic center of this panel is an Innuit in his kayak or sealskin canoe in the act of harpooning a narwhal, which is visible beneath the

surface of the water at the left of the boat. To the right in the middle distance are fulmar gulls. In the distance is the great ice river, the Verhoeff glacier.

The narwhal is an animal about which little is definitely known. Some, notably Peary, think that it is the fabled unicorn of the ancients. It occasionally has both a long and a short horn, one of which it may lose, however. The narwhal is blue-black along the back and spotted with dark along the sides, the color fading into ivory white underneath. The thin skin covers a very deep layer of fat or blubber, considered a delicacy by the Innuit. This blubber is eaten raw, as in fact is most of the food in the Arctics, and of course without pepper or salt, neither of which is known to the Eskimo.

In narwhal hunting, the Innuit approaches the animal from the rear and one side, decreasing the distance noiselessly until he is within striking distance. A companion always accompanies the hunter, so that, in the event of his being struck by the narwhal, and his boat overturned, there may be some rescue at hand. The harpoons used in narwhal hunting formerly had heads made of flakes from the iron meteorites near Cape York, but since the first quarter of the nineteenth century the Eskimo have obtained their metal from traders and from whaling and other ships. The harpoon head is joined to a piece of walrus or narwhal ivory, which fits loosely on to the ivory end of the shaft. To the center of this harpoon head, is fastened a line of walrus hide kept in place by the hand that holds the harpoon. The line itself is coiled on the fore part of the kayak, so that it will unwind rapidly and without becoming tangled. Attached to the other end of this line and placed in the after part of the kayak are two objects, a sealskin bag and a drag resembling a box lid. When the animal dives and flees vainly from the pain of the harpoon point imbedded in its flesh, the drag tires it out, and the skin bag, floating on the surface of the water, marks its position and keeps it from sinking. The hunter, who adroitly gets out of the way of the infuriated animal, can thus trace its course and finally tow it home.

The Verhoeff glacier represented in the painting is one of two glaciers at the head of Robertson Bay, on the northern shore of Inglefield Gulf, West Greenland. It was here that Verhoeff, the meteorologist of one of the Peary Expeditions, while trying to cross the glacier alone, lost his life in September of 1892. The sea wall of the glacier is from 150 to



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SCENE AT CAPE YORK, A SUMMER HOME OF THE ESKIMO.

The southern panel of the West Wall.

200 feet high, but the ice shelves out beneath the water, where the buoyancy of the sea breaks off parts which float away as icebergs. This birth of icebergs at the water's edge of a glacier often causes waves thirty or forty feet in height, miles in extent, and attended by volleys of thunderous reports that are terrifying in the ears of the Eskimo. Each of these glaciers is an arm of the inland ice cap of Greenland, a mighty sheet submerging mountains and valleys to a depth of 5,000 feet or more.

The Third or Southern Panel — Cape York, a Summer Home of the Innuit.

The scene depicted is at Cape York, a summer home of the Innuit, at the head of Melville Bay. Here the Innuit, or Arctic Highlander, as he was misnamed by Sir James Ross, is first met by those visiting the Arctics. The painting gives a view of Cape York looking toward the north.

In the foreground is the camp, where an Innuit leans over a harp-seal which he has killed and is about to cut up, while his dogs are watching for some stray pieces of meat. This man is clothed in bear-skin trousers and a hooded jacket made of about seventy auk skins, the feathers being turned next to the body. He is wearing boots of seal-skin.

To the left in the camp is a girl of about seven years, painted from a sketch made by the artist in 1894. She is clothed in small trousers of fox skin and an upper hooded garment, also of fox skin, and wears boots of sealskin, reaching to the thighs. She is attending a fire of moss and blubber, over which blood soup is being prepared, while guarding from the dogs a piece of meat on the ground at her right. Behind the girl are two sealskin tents (tupekhs) from one of which a young woman is emerging.

Beyond the tents are mountains towering 1500 to 3000 feet above the camp. The summits of these mountains are frequently obscured by dense fogs, from which come continually the wild cries of innumerable multitudes of kittiwake gulls and little auks.

In this bay, but some miles to the eastward, the three meteorites now on exhibition in the foyer of this museum remained for ages. It was Peary who wrested them from their ancient abode and brought them to New York in 1895. From these meteorites, in olden times, the Innuit flaked off pieces for use in knives, harpoons and arrow heads, to aid in the struggle for food and life.

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